

## How EQIP Works in Massachusetts

### General Program Description

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers to implement conservation practices.

Any producer engaged in livestock or crop production on eligible land may apply for EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland, pastureland, private non-industrial forestland, and other farm lands as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Applications for EQIP can be made at local NRCS offices and USDA Service Centers in Massachusetts. While EQIP provides for continuous sign-up, Massachusetts has established a two ranking periods to ensure adequate time to process applications and, ultimately, sign contracts. The closing date for applications to be considered in the first batch ranking period is March 1, 2004. A second batch ranking will be conducted for applications received by August 1, 2004.

Massachusetts ranks and approves applications for funding based on one statewide process, developed in accordance with national guidance and in conjunction with priorities identified by the State Technical Committee and local work groups. The state and local committees are comprised of public and private agencies interested in natural resources protection, and advise NRCS on the implementation of EQIP in Massachusetts. The committees requested and evaluated input on resource concerns, practices needed to treat the resource concerns, financial incentives and program implementation.

### Eligible Practices and Cost Share Rates

A list of eligible practices with variable cost share rates was developed through a practice evaluation process adopted by the State Technical Committee. Conservation practices proposed for funding were assessed based on criteria established in the 2002 Farm Bill. Practices were assessed based on typical applications across the state and the general impact on resource concerns, environmental benefit, cost effectiveness, regulatory compliance, innovation, agricultural production, socio-economic value, national program management priorities and local commodity group priorities. Practices identified as producing the greatest benefit were assigned higher cost-share rates than medium and low beneficial practices. For more information see *Massachusetts EQIP Practice Evaluation Workbook*.

A total of 66 conservation practices have been approved for cost-share in Massachusetts, with an average cost share rate of 49 percent. Some practices may receive 75 percent cost share, if they are part of a Resource Management System (RMS) that addresses all of the identified resource concerns on the field or conservation management unit. *Limited Resource Producers* and *Beginning Farmers* receive 75 percent cost share for all eligible conservation practices, and may receive up to 90 percent cost share for practices that are part of a Resource Management System (RMS). Incentive payments, paid as flat rates over three years, are offered for adoption of management practices not already being applied to the land.

For details see *Massachusetts 2004 EQIP Practice List, Cost List, and Cost List Assumptions*.

### Ranking Criteria

Massachusetts uses one statewide process to evaluate all applications. Ranking criteria and priorities are defined in the 2004 *Application Evaluation Workbook*. Applications are scored by identifying the natural resource concerns and the extent of treatment and environmental benefit to be achieved.

The formula for calculating environmental benefit is: resource concern x environmental gain x location factor x priority factor. Environmental gain is assessed using NRCS Resource Quality Criteria. Priority factors give higher priority to water quality projects, followed by water conservation and soil erosion measures.

Location factors work to prioritize applications that propose improvements in environmentally sensitive areas, including:

- 1) **IMPAIRED WATER:** Massachusetts 2002 Integrated List of Impaired Waters (*waters requiring a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)*), and Massachusetts Nonpoint Source Pollution Action Strategy;
- 2) **DRINKING WATER:** Wellhead Protection Areas (Zone II), Interim Wellhead Protection Areas, Outstanding Resource Waters, Sole Source Aquifers and private wells;
- 3) **OTHER WATERS:** groundwater and surface water (*aquifers, wetlands, streams, lakes, etc.*);
- 4) **FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT** (Estimated Habitat, Priority Habitat, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Designated Shellfish Areas, and presence of anadromous fish runs or cold water fisheries).

Additional points are given to proposals with features that enhance public investment, such as: conservation treatment of protected agricultural lands, compliance with environmental regulations, leveraged funds, adoption of whole-farm plans and resource management systems, lifespan of the practices, sustainable and improved agricultural production, and innovation.

### EQIP Process:

The following steps identify the overall program process:

1. File a program application (sign CCC-1200 form and Appendix) at your local USDA Service Center.
2. Develop a conservation plan and work with NRCS to record your decisions. Technical assistance for conservation planning is available from USDA, either through your local NRCS staff or Certified Technical Service Providers (TSP). To find a TSP in your area, go online to <http://techreg.usda.gov/>
3. NRCS approves applications based on statewide ranking of applications. Highest ranked projects will be approved for funding until all funds are obligated. Notice of approval or deferral of applications is expected by April 30<sup>th</sup> for the initial batch ranking, and August 30<sup>th</sup> for the second batch.
4. Contract is developed and approved by NRCS and applicant. Contract must be finalized no later than September 30, 2004.
5. Practice implementation may begin as soon as contract is signed.
6. Apply to NRCS for payment upon satisfactory completion of work. Receipts or bills may be required.

### For More Information

Please contact Richard DeVergilio, Massachusetts EQIP Program Manager, by phone (413) 253-4379, or email [Rick.DeVergilio@ma.usda.gov](mailto:Rick.DeVergilio@ma.usda.gov). Or contact NRCS at your local USDA Service Center.

USDA Service Centers		
<b>Barnstable</b>	270 Communications Way, Unit 1G, Hyannis, MA 02601	508-771-6476
<b>Dighton</b>	84 Center St, Dighton, MA 02715-1229	508-669-6621
<b>Greenfield</b>	55 Federal Street, Room 290, Greenfield, MA 01301	413-772-0384 ext 3
<b>Hadley</b>	195 Russell Street, Suite B6, Hadley, MA 01035	413-585-1000 ext 3
<b>Holden</b>	52 Boyden Road, Room 10, Holden, MA 01520	508-829-4477 ext 3
<b>Pittsfield</b>	78 Center Street, Suite 206, Pittsfield, MA 01201	413-443-1776 ext 3
<b>Westford</b>	319 Littleton Road, Suite 302, Westford, MA 01886	978-692-1904 ext 3
<b>West Wareham</b>	15 Cranberry Highway, West Wareham, MA 02576	508-295-5151 ext 2

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